

Blind Pony Lake Conservation Area

Ten-Year Area Management Plan FY 2016-2025




Fisheries Division Chief


Date

Blind Pony Lake Conservation Area Management Plan Approval Page

PLANNING TEAM:

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CENTRAL REGION

Central RCT Chair

 3/14/16
Signature Date

FISHERIES DIVISION

Fisheries Management Chief

 3/18/16
Signature Date

OVERVIEW

- **Official Area Name:** Blind Pony Lake Conservation Area, #6512
- **Year Established:** 1966
- **Acreage:** 2,246 acres
- **County:** Saline
- **Division with Administrative Responsibility:** Fisheries
- **Division with Maintenance Responsibility:** Fisheries
- **Statement of Primary Purpose:**

A. Strategic Direction

Manage Blind Pony Lake Conservation Area (CA) for a diverse and quality sport fishery. Protect and maintain water quality and prevent the introduction of aquatic invasive species. Manage open land habitats for early successional wildlife species. Manage forest communities using best management practices and restore woodland communities. Provide area users compatible and inviting multiple-use opportunities for recreation, education and information.

B. Desired Future Condition

The desired future condition at Blind Pony Lake CA is a quality sport fishery, protecting Blind Pony Lake water quality and early successional habitats with abundant wildlife.

C. Federal Aid Purpose

- This area, or a portion thereof, was acquired and developed with Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars to provide land or facilities for public outdoor recreation.
- This area, or a portion thereof, was acquired with Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration funds to restore and manage sport fish, conserve and restore sport fish habitat (or a buffer to protect that habitat) and provide public access for sport fishing.

GENERAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

I. Special Considerations

- A. **Priority Areas:** None
- B. **Natural Areas:** None

II. Important Natural Features and Resources

- A. **Species of Conservation Concern:** None known
- B. **Caves:** None
- C. **Springs:** None

III. Existing Infrastructure

- 1 fish hatchery/office/shop, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible; includes 2 pumps, 2 chillers, 3 boilers, 2 heat exchangers, numerous valves, 20 concrete raceways, 14 1.5-acre ponds, 11 1-acre ponds, 11 0.5-acre ponds, 3 0.1-acre pond, 25 paddle wheel aerators, generator and switch gear
- 1 fishing dock (ADA accessible)
- 2 fishing jetties (ADA accessible)
- 10 boats available on a first-come basis; only Department-owned boats allowed on Blind Pony Lake
- 11 gravel parking lots (2 with ADA-accessible concrete pads)
- 1 pavilions(ADA accessible)
- 3 privies (ADA accessible)
- 195-acre Blind Pony Lake
- 8 fishing ponds (each 1-5 acres)
- 54 fishless ponds (each less than 1 acre)
- 3.5 miles of gravel roads, 0.7 miles of paved roadway
- Other buildings: 3 storage buildings, chemical building, sturgeon building, 2 houses, water tower, pump building
- Numerous tiles, terraces and stream crossings

IV. Area Restrictions or Limitations

A. Deed Restrictions: None

B. Federal Interest:

The Land and Water Conservation Fund: This land must provide land/facilities for public outdoor recreation in perpetuity. Federal funds may also be used in the management of this land. Fish and wildlife agencies may not allow recreational activities and related facilities that would interfere with the purpose for which the State is managing the land. Other uses may be acceptable and must be assessed in each specific situation.

Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration: Uses of land acquired with federal funds may not interfere with the purpose for which it was acquired. Closures to sport fishing must be based on the recommendations of the state fish and wildlife agency for fish and wildlife management purposes. Federal funds may also be used in the management of this land. Fish and wildlife agencies may not allow recreational activities and related facilities that would interfere with the purpose for which the State is managing the land. Other uses may be acceptable and must be assessed in each specific situation.

U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration:

Federal funds were used in the development of this area, or a portion thereof. The Department must maintain the developed project throughout its useful life.

Federal funds may also be used in the management of this land. Fish and wildlife agencies may not allow recreational activities and related facilities that would interfere with the purpose for which the State is managing the land. Other uses may be acceptable and must be assessed in each specific situation.

C. Easements:

- Right of way easements held by Central Missouri Electric Cooperative, Public Water Supply District #1, #3 and #4 of Saline County, State of Missouri (Highway ZZ right of way), Sweet Springs Special Road District and Saline County Special Road District.
- Flood easement at the upper end of the lake on lands owned by Leland Mueller and William Melies.
- Drainage easement below the lake on Raymond Sims farm.

D. Cultural Resources: No known cultural resources.

E. Hazards and Hazardous Wastes: Concrete spillways, hatchery pond structures, pumps, etc. that are accessible to the public; uncut timber, submerged logs and stumps in the lake; chemical building.

F. Endangered Species: None observed.

G. Boundary Issues: None

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

V. Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Invasive species (sericea lespedeza, fescue, black locust, autumn olive, and cedar).
- 2) Woody invasion of open lands.
- 3) Forest and woodland communities.

Management Objective 1: Maintain upland habitats for quail and small game.

Strategy 1: Apply prescribed fire at appropriate intervals and during various times of the year to increase plant diversity (Wildlife, Fisheries).

Strategy 2: Apply invasive species best management practices to curb invasion and allow proliferation of appropriate flora (Wildlife, Fisheries).

Strategy 3: Use agricultural crop rotation to keep a diverse food and habitat source for wildlife while protecting the watershed of Blind Pony Lake (Wildlife, Fisheries).

Strategy 4: Use edge feathering and brush pile techniques to provide woody cover (Wildlife, Fisheries).

Strategy 5: Explore designating Blind Pony Lake CA as a Quail Emphasis Area (Wildlife, Fisheries).

Strategy 6: Develop a plan to monitor quail and small game populations (Wildlife).

Management Objective 2: Control invasive species on open lands.

Strategy 1: Monitor for invasive vegetation, diseases and insects. Suppress any infestations that may develop by using management techniques including but not limited to mechanical and chemical control methods. (Wildlife, Fisheries)

Strategy 2: Disk, spray and plant food plots. (Wildlife, Fisheries).

Management Objective 3: Manage current crop fields with annual crops.

Strategy 1: Use best management practices to reduce soil erosion, only using fields with a very low probability (Wildlife, Fisheries).

Strategy 2: Use permittee farming to manage crop fields. (Wildlife, Fisheries).

Strategy 3: Increase wheat acres. (Wildlife, Fisheries).

Strategy 4: Develop a cover crop plan and implement management activities identified (Wildlife).

Management Objective 4: Manage the forest and woodland areas.

Strategy 1: Conduct a complete forest inventory on the area that will be used to guide future management decisions. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Manage the area to benefit species of conservation concern and woodland and forest communities. Management actions include, but are not limited to, conducting forest stand improvement, prescribed burns, snag retention and a multi-layered canopy with small gaps. Conduct management actions in accordance with the forest management plan developed based on the forest inventory. (Forestry)

Strategy 3: Monitor for invasive vegetation, diseases and insects. Suppress any infestations that may develop by using management techniques including but not limited to mechanical and chemical control methods. (Forestry)

VI. Aquatic Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Blind Pony Lake (195 acres) was renovated in 2006.
- 2) Eight 1- to 5-acre fishing ponds.
- 3) Fifty-four fishless ponds (each less than 1 acre).
- 4) One and seven tenths miles of Pony Creek.

5) Invasive White River crayfish.

Management Objective 1: Prevent the introduction of new aquatic invasive organisms into Blind Pony Lake and prevent the spread of the White River crayfish.

Strategy 1: Continue to use the Biosecurity Plan for Blind Pony Hatchery (Biosecurity Plan Blind Pony Hatchery, 2014) (Fisheries).

Strategy 2: Only use MDC hatcheries to stock fishing into Blind Pony Lake and area ponds.

Strategy 3: Enforce current regulations of no private boats or outboard motors allowed and no bait held or transported in containers with water (Fisheries, Protection).

Strategy 4: Continue to monitor for Zebra Mussels (Fisheries).

Management Objective 2: Promote the assets of the Blind Pony Lake fishery, including the potential for large largemouth bass.

Strategy 1: Highlight these attributes in the Missouri Department of Conservation's (the Department's) annual *Fishing Prospects* publication (Fisheries).

Strategy 2: Maintain current fish attractors (brush piles and artificial structures) to concentrate sport fish near the picnic areas, ADA-accessible fishing dock and fishing jetties (Fisheries).

Strategy 3: Continue use of the protected slot length limit of 12-15 inches on largemouth bass and creel limits of six largemouth bass, four channel catfish or blue catfish combined, 30 crappie and 20 of all other fish (in aggregate) (Fisheries, Protection).

Management Objective 3: Enhance the existing fishery at Blind Pony Lake through restoration of high-quality bluegill and redear sunfish.

Strategy 1: Continue to monitor largemouth bass, crappie, channel catfish, bluegill and redear sunfish populations. (Fisheries).

Strategy 2: Develop and implement a plan to reduce crappie densities (Fisheries).

Strategy 3: Monitor introduced aquatic plants and reintroduce if necessary (Fisheries).

Strategy 4: Reduce channel catfish densities by encouraging harvest. Cancel regular stocking of channel catfish until their growth rates increase (Fisheries).

Management Objective 4: Maintain or enhance stream corridors to improve water quality and promote stable stream banks.

Strategy 1: Evaluate buffer widths and conditions. Maintain a forested corridor through natural regeneration or planting. A minimum 200 foot wide corridor

should be maintained, where not limited by area boundary (Forestry and Fisheries).

Strategy 2: Maintain and/or establish vegetated buffers, pursuant to Department guidelines (Missouri Department of Conservation, 2009), on both sides of permanent and intermittent streams (Fisheries).

Management Objective 5: Promote angling at ponds capable of supporting fish.

Strategy 1: Monitor fish populations through electrofishing surveys, as needed (Fisheries).

Strategy 2: Stock channel catfish every 3 to 5 years at a rate of 20 fish per acre when channel catfish are needed (Fisheries).

Strategy 3: Manage aquatic and pond-side vegetation to allow reasonable shoreline angling (Fisheries).

Strategy 4: Promote beneficial aquatic plants, where appropriate (Fisheries).

Strategy 5: Maintain pond dams (Fisheries, Design and Development).

Strategy 6: Control muskrats and beavers (Fisheries).

Strategy 7: Manage and maintain renovated ponds (Fisheries, Design and Development).

- **Clemens Pond:** Renovated in 2012. Removed excess sediment and added woody habitat and pallet structures for fish attractors. Restocked with minnows, bluegill and channel catfish in 2013 and largemouth bass in spring of 2014. Will remain closed to fishing until fish population is deemed fishable.
- **Egan Pond:** Renovated in 2013. Removed excess sediment and added woody habitat and pallet structures for fish attractors. Restocked with minnows, bluegill and channel catfish in 2014 and largemouth bass in spring of 2015. Will remain closed to fishing until fish population is deemed fishable.
- **Cromley Pond:** Renovated in 2014. Removed excess sediment and added woody habitat and pallet structures for fish attractors. Plan to restock with minnows, bluegill and channel catfish in 2015 and largemouth bass in spring of 2016. Will remain closed to fishing until fish population is deemed fishable.

Management Objective 6: Provide suitable habitat for amphibians and reptiles in fishless ponds.

Strategy 1: Do not stock ponds that provide no long-term fisheries management options (Fisheries).

Strategy 2: Enhance amphibian breeding habitat by maintaining and/or adding woody structure (Fisheries).

VII. Public Use Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Provide multiple-use opportunities.
- 2) Provide ADA-accessible fishing opportunities.
- 3) Provide opportunity for archery-only deer hunting.
- 4) Manage the loaner boat program.
- 5) Maintain picnic areas.
- 6) Regularly conduct trash removal.

Management Objective 1: Provide area users compatible and inviting multiple-use opportunities for recreation, education and information.

Strategy 1: Maintain signs according to Department policy (Fisheries).

Strategy 2: Communicate to the general public the recreational opportunities available on the area through use of tools like brochures and accurate information in the Missouri Atlas database (Fisheries, Wildlife, and Outreach and Education).

Strategy 3: Maintain the ADA-accessible fishing dock and jetty to promote a safe and enjoyable fishing experience (Fisheries, Design and Development).

Strategy 4: Maintain loaner boats to promote a safe and enjoyable experience (Fisheries).

Strategy 5: Maintain picnic areas to Department standards (Fisheries).

Strategy 6: Regularly remove trash (Fisheries).

Strategy 7: Maintain/promote small game hunting opportunities (Wildlife).

VIII. Administrative Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Maintain area infrastructure at current levels.
- 2) Acquisition of land.

Management Objective1: Maintain area infrastructure at current levels.

Strategy 1: Maintain area infrastructure in accordance with Department guidelines (Fisheries, Design and Development).

Lands Proposed for Acquisition:

When available, land within the Blind Pony Lake watershed may be considered for acquisition from willing sellers. Tracts that help protect water quality, improve area access, provide public use opportunities, contain unique natural communities and/or species of conservation concern, or meet other Department priorities, as identified in the annual Department land acquisition priorities, may be considered.

MANAGEMENT TIMETABLE

Strategies are considered ongoing unless listed in the following table.

	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25
Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations										
<i>Objective 1</i>										
Strategy 5	X	X								
Strategy 6	X									
<i>Objective 3</i>										
Strategy 3	X									
Strategy 4	X									
<i>Objective 4</i>										
Strategy		X								
Aquatic Resource Management Considerations										
<i>Objective 2</i>										
Strategy 2	X			X			X			X
<i>Objective 4</i>										
Strategy 1			X					X		
<i>Objective 5</i>										
Strategy 1			X			X			X	
Strategy 2	X				X					
Strategy 4			X			X			X	
Strategy 7	X	X								
<i>Objective 6</i>										
Strategy 2	X					X				

APPENDICES

Area Background:

The area is located in the prime agricultural lands found midway between the towns of Marshall and Sweet Springs. There are several stories as to how the area received its name. The generally accepted story is that a group of freed slaves settled in the area shortly after the Civil War. They were poor and farmed with blind horses because they could buy them much cheaper. Since that time, this vicinity has been called Blind Pony.

The initial land acquisition of 1,120 acres for the Blind Pony Lake CA occurred in 1966. Eleven additional tracts totaling 1,127 acres have been added. The objectives of the acquisition are to increase the Department's ownership of the lake's watershed in an effort to reduce soil erosion and sedimentation into the lake.

The primary purpose for the area was to provide a lake-oriented multiple use area and a site for a warm-water fish hatchery. Department crews began construction in December 1966. Lake construction costs including roads, boat ramp, parking lots, concession building, etc., totaled \$294,000. Construction costs for the fish hatchery including hatchery pools, hatchery building, concrete tanks and two houses totaled \$820,000. The lake was opened to fishing in October 1969 and the hatchery began operation in 1970.

The lake is the only water supply for the hatchery and has been plagued with siltation problems from highly erodible agricultural lands in the watershed. Water quality problems for the hatchery and habitat management problems in the lake have resulted. Several attempts have been made to improve hatchery water quality including the construction of a siltation structure in the upper end of the lake, the purchase of key tracts in the watershed and installation of oxygenation and filtering equipment at the hatchery. The lake had a major renovation in 2004-2006. It was completely drained and 450,000 cubic yards of sediment were removed and spread on 40 acres of old fields on the area. Though definite improvements have been made in the water quality, problems still exist.

There are several regulations in place that will lessen the chances of an accidental introduction of zebra mussels into Blind Pony Lake. Zebra mussels are an invasive species that have caused numerous problems in other states and would be very disruptive for the hatchery if they were introduced into Blind Pony Lake. Private boats are prohibited on this lake; boats and oars for use on the lake are provided free of charge on a first-come, first-served basis, and anglers may use their own electric trolling motors on Department boats. Anglers will be required to supply their own floatation devices. In addition, bait transported or held in containers with water is prohibited.

The area is open to the public from 4 a.m. to 10 p.m. Other area facilities include parking lots, ADA-accessible fishing dock and jetties, privies and pavilion. The hatchery conducts tours by appointment only.

Current Land and Water Types:

Land/Water Type	Acres	Feet	% of Area
Old Fields	1,090.5		49
Cropland	474.5		21
Upland Forest/Woodland	290		13
Impounded Water	230		10
Native Grass	86		4
Infrastructure	75		3
Total	2,246		100
Stream Frontage (Pony Creek)		8,976	

Public Input Summary:

The draft Blind Pony Lake Conservation Area Management Plan was available for a public comment period October 1–31, 2015. The Missouri Department of Conservation received comments from 6 respondents (Appendix A). The Blind Pony Lake Conservation Area Planning Team carefully reviewed and considered these ideas as they finalized this document. A brief summary of public input themes, including how they were incorporated or why they were not, can be found below. Rather than respond to each individual comment, comments are grouped into general themes and are addressed collectively.

Department responses to themes and issues identified through Blind Pony Lake Conservation Area public comment period

Supports prescribed burning for habitat management.

The area planning team appreciates this comment and will continue to manage the area for Missouri's fish, forests, and wildlife, as well as for people to enjoy these natural resources.

Suggests adding dove field and allowing dove hunting only in afternoons.

This suggestion is addressed in Terrestrial Management Objective 1, Strategy 3. Through the use of the Agriculture Crop Program, approximately seven acres of sunflowers will be planted yearly. Currently Blind Pony Lake CA is under statewide dove regulations and at this time there is no plan to change this regulation.

Suggests stocking pheasants on area.

The Department considered “put and take” pheasant hunting opportunities in the early 2000s. The Department did not choose at that time to do any additional stockings to augment our wild pheasant population nor did the Department desire to conduct any “put and take” game bird hunting operations on MDC land. The pheasant season was also adjusted to allow statewide harvest, under the assumption that pheasants had already dispersed and moved into suitable habitat and had developed huntable populations if they were going to do so across the state. The management focus on Blind Pony will be toward quail and small game habitat to provide hunting opportunities for those native species.

Suggests allowing public to view hatchery operations.

Tours are provided by appointment only, by contacting the hatchery. It is very important for biosecurity reasons and safety of the public and employees to keep traffic in and out of the hatchery to a minimum. Any kind of distraction increases the risk of injury to the staff or public. The more people coming and going from the hatchery also increases the chance of introducing disease or unwanted organisms to the hatchery. The introduction of disease or unwanted organisms in hatcheries can jeopardize fish production efforts.

Suggests allowing personally owned kayaks and inflatables for day-use fishing and recreation. Concern that available boats are in need of repair. Suggests adding navigational lights to available boats to encourage catfishing at night.

While the area planning team sees the opportunity of allowing personally owned kayaks and inflatables for day use on the area as a benefit to area users, this is a major biosecurity risk for the hatchery. Blind Pony Lake was built as a water supply to the hatchery. The lake is the sole water supply for the hatchery so it is a necessary to eliminate as many potential biosecurity risks as possible, which includes the introduction of unwanted organisms by outside vessels.

Currently the available boats are in good condition, six of these boats were new in 2012. The boats are checked Monday and Friday when hatchery staff is working weekdays only. When hatchery staff is working weekdays and weekends, the boats are checked Sunday, Monday, Friday, and Saturday of each week. Repairs are made as needed. The boats are also pressure washed and thoroughly inspected each winter, and repaired as needed.

The team agrees with the suggestion that adding navigational lights to boats would benefit area users; however, since staff time is not available to install or maintain lights we will not be providing boats for nighttime use.

Suggests adding/mowing a better trail to bigger fishing ponds.

Currently a 15 foot wide trail is mowed to each of the larger fishing ponds. This trail is usually mowed one to two times a month depending on the season. Three of the eight fishing ponds are currently closed to fishing for pond renovations; trails to these ponds are not being mowed. When these ponds are deemed fishable, we will start mowing trails to these ponds again.

Suggests designating 10-12 miles of multi-use trails for horseback riding and access for anglers to area ponds.

Currently, horseback riding is allowed on any road open to vehicular traffic (roads and parking lots open to the public). Having more or longer trails open to this activity increases the potential of interference with existing area uses and sensitive habitats. While the planning team understands a desire by some to expand this activity on the area, there are no plans for adding more equestrian trails at this location. In addition, the Conservation Commission approved only selected conservation areas for horseback riding circa 2007 and at that time Blind Pony Lake CA was not chosen to offer this type of use. Horseback riding will continue to be limited to current roadways open to vehicular traffic. The Area Manager will suggest to users who request this activity to pursue this recreational opportunity on: Prairie Home Conservation Area (60 miles away); Knob Noster State Park (25 miles away) or the section of Katy Trail from Sedalia to Clinton which is also open to equestrian use (approximately 30 miles away).

References:

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2009). *Watershed and stream management guidelines for lands and waters managed by Missouri Department of Conservation*. Jefferson City, Missouri: Missouri Department of Conservation.

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2014). *Missouri watershed protection practice recommended practices for Missouri forests: 2014 management guidelines for maintaining forested watersheds to protect streams*. Jefferson City, Missouri: Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri.

Biosecurity Plan Blind Pony Hatchery. (2014). Retrieved from <http://mdcsharepoint/sites/Fisheries/Documents/Hatcheries/Biosecurity%20Plans/BLIND%20PONY%20HATCHERY%20Biosecurity%20Plan%202014.pdf>

Maps:

Figure 1: Area Map

Figure 2: Aerial Map

Figure 3: Cover Map

Figure 4: Easements Map

Additional Appendices:

Appendix A. Blind Pony Lake Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Figure 1: Area Map

BLIND PONY LAKE CONSERVATION AREA

SALINE COUNTY
2,246 ACRES

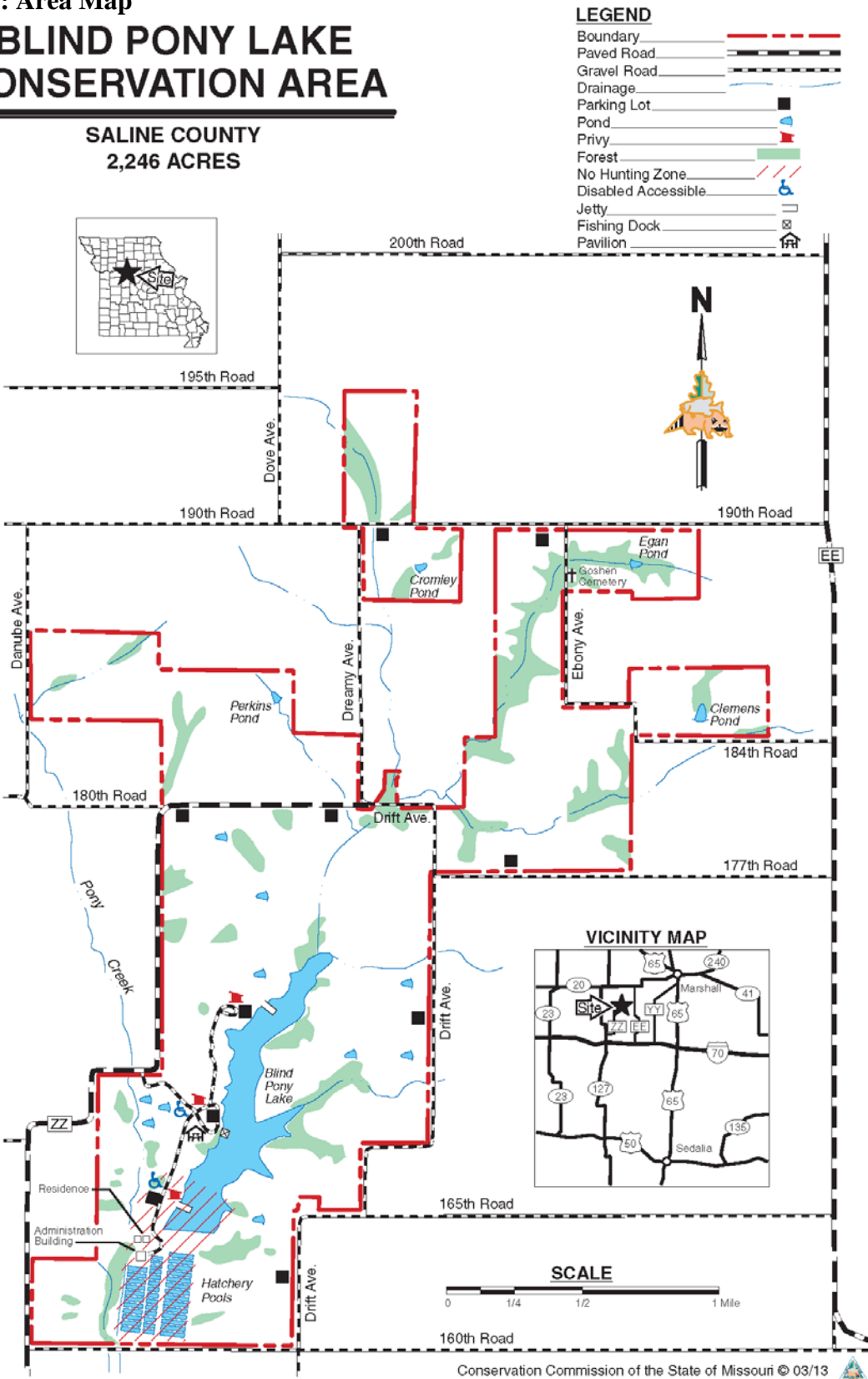


Figure 2: Aerial Map

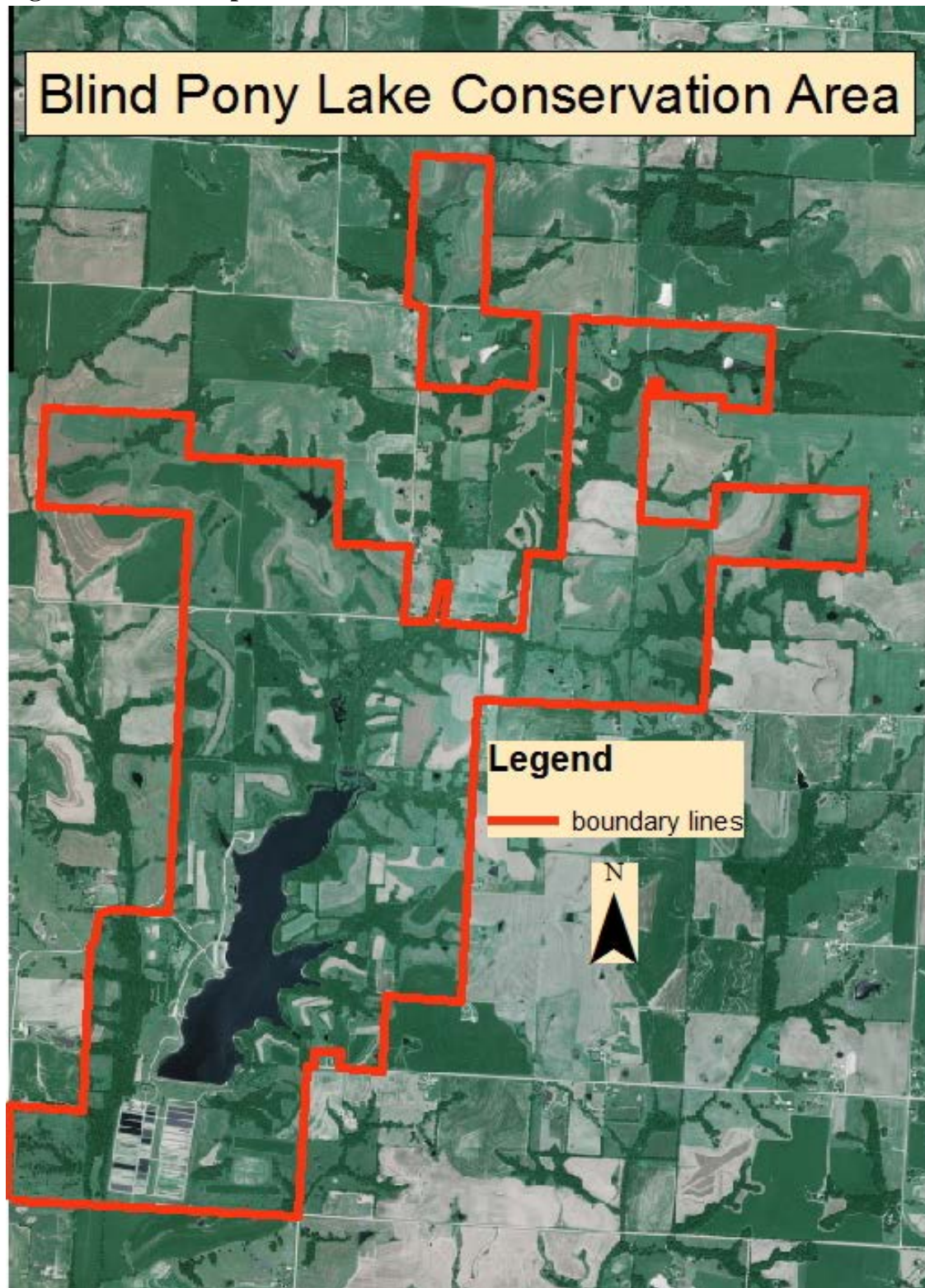


Figure 3: Cover Map

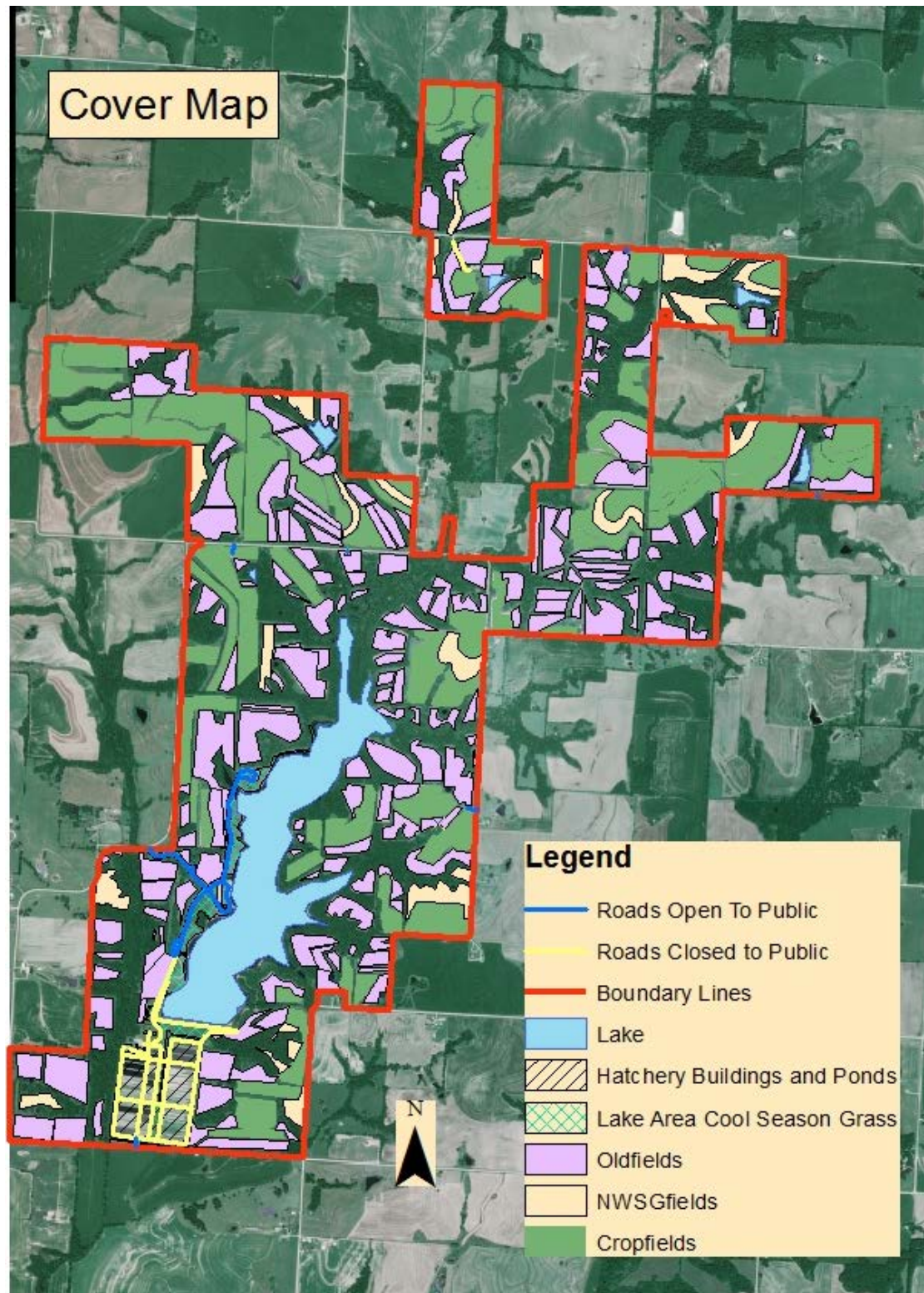
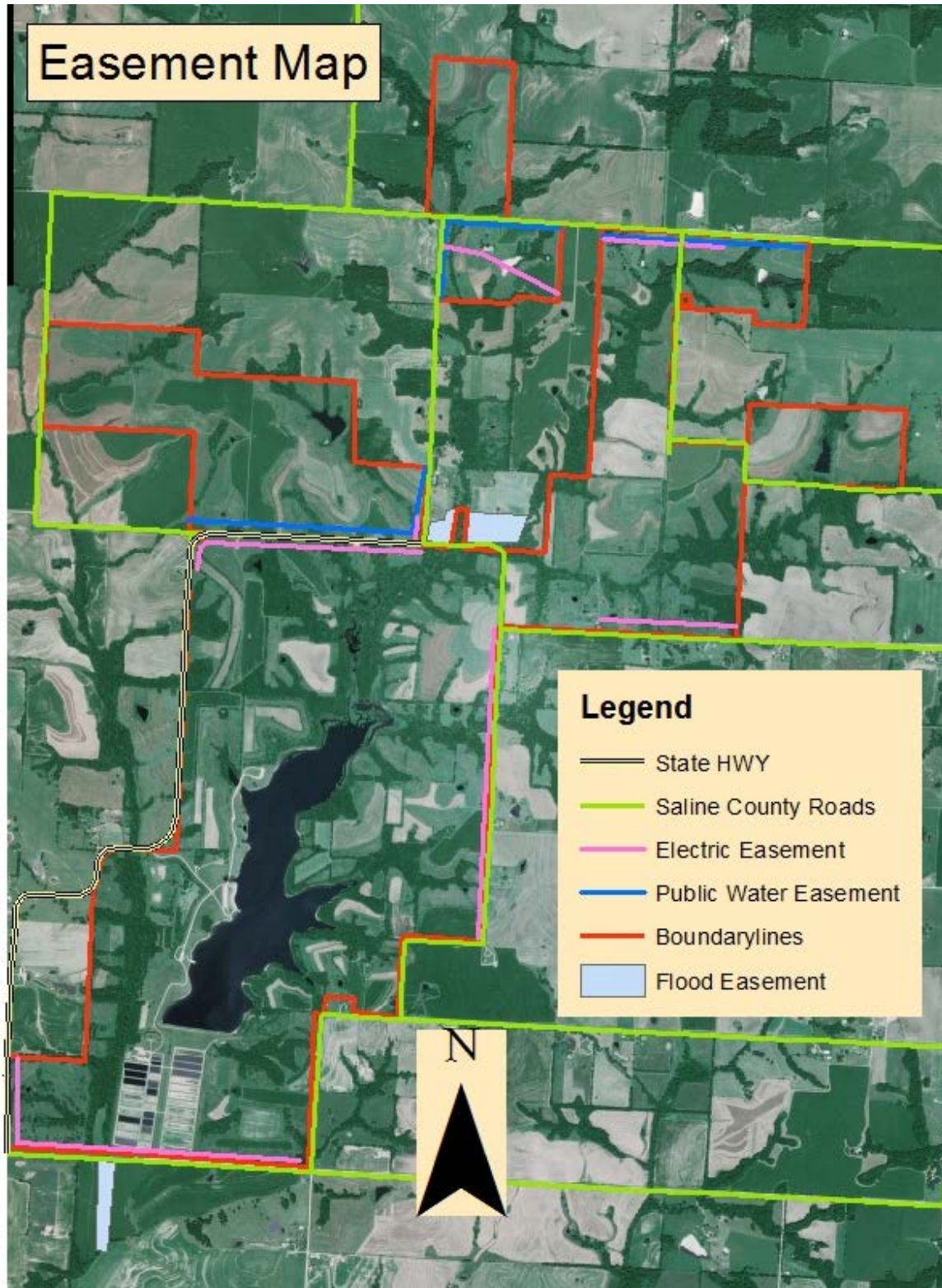


Figure 4: Easements Map



Appendix A. Blind Pony Lake Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Received during public comment period (October 1-31, 2015):

Please include managed fields for dove hunting. I know that at one time this was done. Also it should only be for afternoon hunting (this should be a rule on all MDC dove fields) to keep the quality of hunts for a longer time. Also, consider stocking appropriate strains of ring neck pheasant.
Recommend opening the hatchery operation to public viewing if only on a published limited schedule basis, for the benefit of public information and youth education.
I like BPCA and love what it being done with it. With the three ponds being improved, I would like to see a little better trail to some of the bigger fishing ponds. At minimum a path cut and maintained through the tall grass and maybe a small sign or two guiding us to the more remote ponds.
I understand the need to prevent zebra mussels through restriction of personal boats that may have been sitting in infected waters for any length of time, but would very much like to see some way of allowing personally owned kayaks and inflatables implemented, as these do not sit in other bodies of water for long periods to create a noteworthy risk of having zebra mussels attached to them when put into Blind Pony Lake. The freedom to bring our own kayaks and inflatables would encourage day use fishing and recreational activities such as nature and wildlife photography from the water. Several of the boats currently provided by the lake management are in need of repair or replacement, especially for damaged oar locks. Adding navigational lights to these boats for those willing to bring our own battery (as many do this anyhow for an electric motor we also bring ourselves) would also encourage more catfishing, as catfishing is best done after dark. Mostly though I would just like to be able to bring my kayak there for day fishing.
Mention of prescribed burning and open understory is a welcome addition to what is mostly a fishing based plan. Any area with the possibility of same game management, especially quail should be taken advantage of.
Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Blind Pony Lake Conservation Area Management Plan.
SMMBCH recommends that the Department designate 10-12 miles of multi-use trails on Blind Pony Lake CA. The size of this Area, the upland landscape, and the well-drained soils make the area suitable for developing a multi-use trail network. It will be simple to locate the trails in such a way as to minimize conflicts with other users, such as fishermen. A trail system could also be designed to provide fishermen an access route to ponds on the CA.
This CA is listed as a priority for trail designation in the 2015 SMMBCH Proposal to Expand Public Land Multi-Use Trails in Missouri; the purpose is to help to meet the demand for public-

land riding opportunities in Lafayette County and the Greater Kansas City Area. Our organization offers, subject to availability of volunteers, to assist the Department to layout and mark trails and install or improve supporting infrastructure.

Thank you for your due consideration and for the opportunity to comment.